New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1952

Volume XIII, Number 23 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of November 24, 1952

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**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of November 24, 1952*

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"The Seven Year Itch"

DAILY NEWS

November 21, 1952

'Seven Year Itch' Grand Comedy

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"The Seven Year Itch," by George Axelrod, opened at the Fulton Theatre last evening and quickly set about the business of reducing this reporter to a state of foolish laughter. It is a grand and goofy comedy and it will relieve the dolors of even a Stevenson voter.

In this nonsensical play about a slight case of adultery, a pickle-pussed actor, Tom Ewell, and a dreamy young dish, Vanessa Brown, give the gayest performances possible. It has been a long time since the Broadway theatre was funny on purpose, so the arrival of "The Seven Year Itch" on 46th St. is as welcome as the appearance of Balto, the sled dog, with his load of serum in Nome, Alaska.

Mr. Ewell is a married man. Has been for seven years. His wife, Neva Patterson, goes up to Massachusetts for the Summer with their son. Tom will have to stay here in the apartment and work, but will come up weekends. That is the plan, anyhow.

A Visiting Tomato.

But Miss Brown, who lives in the apartment upstairs, tips a potted tomato plant off her terrace onto Ewell's terrace and if he had been under it the thing would have killed him. However, he is brooding on another spot of the terrace at the time, so is not injured. Naturally, he and she become acquainted—and that is all there is to the plot.

Axelrod has filled in this plot with a lot of delightful nonsense. His hero, Ewell, is something like James Thurber's Walter Mitty, subject to dreaming about situations and conquests. These dreams are part of the play—even the one in which his beautiful wife, Neva Patterson, learns about his wayward night with the girl from upstairs and shoots him dead. His death is the funniest and most prolonged since Fannie Brice danced the swan.

Also in the comedy are pertinent and hilarious comments about psychiatry, novel-writing and the two-bit publishing business. (Ewell, an editor of reprints for the drug store trade, is at the moment engaged in trying to think of a more sexy title for Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter.")

In this play, Ewell, always a funny fellow, comes to the top of his career. Not since the late Frank Craven has there been so ordinary an ordinary husband, or one so thoroughly controlled by a wife. When he lies dying from five pistol wounds, for instance, he asks Miss Patterson for a cigaret, but gives in meekly when she reminds him that the doctor told him smoking was bad for him. Ewell's is a crafty and craftsmanlike performance.

Cute Quiz Kid.

Miss Brown should be the girl upstairs in every apartment building, being so pretty, so pleasant and so bright. She started out in life as one of the original Quiz Kids, played a child's part in "Watch on the Rhine," went to the movies and now comes back as just the right girl to upset the life of a fellow like Ewell.

"THE SEVEN YEAR ITCH"

Comedy by George Axelrod; staged by John Gerstad; settings by Frederick Fox; incidental music by Dana Suesse; presented by Courtney Burr and Elliott Nugent at the Fulton Theatre, November 20, 1952. The cast:

Richard Sherman...Tom Ewell
Helen Sherman..Neva Patterson
Ricky.....Johnny Klein
Miss Morris....Marilyn Clark
Elaine.....Joan Donovan
Marie What-ever-her-name-was
Irene Moore
The Girl.....Vanessa Brown
Dr. Brubaker..Robert Emhardt
Tom Mackenzie..George Keane
Voice of Richard's Conscience..
George Ives
Voice of the Girl's Conscience..
Pat Fowler

John Gerstad has directed "The Seven Year Itch" with a light touch and sure humor, and the supervisory efforts of one of the producers, Elliott Nugent, are apparent—for, a few years ago, Nugent would have been playing Ewell's part. Frederick Fox's apartment setting is attractive—and I mustn't stop writing this cheerful piece without saluting Robert Embardt for his playing of a psychiatrist.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

November 21, 1952

'The Seven Year Itch'

By WALTER F. KERR

TOM EWELL, whose woebegone face was obviously designed by the creators of Gerald McBoing-Boing, has been in need of a full-length part to play for some time. In "The Seven Year Itch," which opened at the Fulton Thursday night, George Axelrod has written him a dandy one.

Mr. Ewell is cast as a thoroughly domesticated publisher's assistant whose wife of seven years has just hied herself off for a summer in the country. When we first meet him he is roaming restlessly around his empty city apartment, snapping back at the radio, bemoaning that lonesome dinner at Schrafft's, and wishing that a nervous stomach hadn't put him off cigarettes.

• • •

When a gigantic flower pot tumbles down from an overhead balcony and nearly puts him permanently out of his misery, he suddenly snaps to. He realizes that life and love are slipping by, that he may pass on any time now without having accepted a single one of those invitations to midnight-madness which various attractive women have put in his path. With the rake in him reborn, he daringly lights a cigarette ("All those lovely injurious tars and resins"), giddily pours himself a shot of forbidden Scotch, and invites the delectable doll who lives on the floor above down for an evening of temptation.

• • •

This latter-day, and decidedly nervous, Don Juan has a conscience, though—it quite literally follows him about the apartment—and there ensues a soul-struggle of heroic and hilarious proportions. What George Axelrod has done is to dramatize, with a light touch and genially satirical point of view, the horrifying things which run through this awakened mouse's disturbed mind.

• • •

Thus we are treated to a fine parody of clipped and cryptic British romance as our hero imagines himself seducing his ravishing neighbor on a piano-bench. We watch him simultaneously worry about who may be seducing his wife in the country, and we see the scenes in terms of a bad modern novel. We get our man in Humphrey Bogart mood as, a damp cigarette dangling from his lower lip, he casts his conquest aside once he has had his will of her. And finally we get the piece de resistance: a delicious bit of mockery in which his homebody of a wife, busy whipping up a cherry pie, learns about his escapade, shoots him through the heart, and then callously refuses the dying man a last cigarette.

To this parade of purple fantasies Tom Ewell brings an almost inexhaustible supply of unlikely leers, majestic attitudes and frantic palpitations. Whether he is waltzing around the room in delirium over his new-found freedom, or dreaming such enchanting dreams over what is going to happen when the doorbell rings that he doesn't hear the doorbell when it does ring, Mr. Ewell is extraordinarily funny.

• • •

And the rest of the company, under John Gerstad's nicely shaded direction, has caught the glancing spirit of Mr. Axelrod's charade as well. Vanessa Brown plays the featherbrained television actress who has caught this fading Lothario's eye, and she bubbles with bright good humor. She is especially fetching as she laughs mightily at one of her own idiot jokes, and she is an entrancingly lunatic vision as she disappears through a trapdoor in the ceiling as the romance ends. (This does happen in the play at the Fulton, but there will be no further explanation here.)

• • •

Neva Patterson is as pretty and as cool as a peppermint as the wife who has departed, leaving daddy to make all that money in the hot city. George Keane is fine in two of the satirical sketches, and Robert Embhardt is vastly amusing as an airy psychiatrist who has his own tendencies toward uxoricide.

"The Seven Year Itch" is a happy bit of domestic skylarking, and a delightful addition to the season.

The New York Times

November 21, 1952

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Tom Ewell and George Axelrod might begin the day by gratefully thanking each other. For Mr. Axelrod has written the sort of giddy part that a comedian can act uproariously, and Mr. Ewell has returned the favor with a superb performance. The play is called "The Seven Year Itch," and it opened at the Fulton last evening to an audience that settled down to three acts of skittish amusement.

All Mr. Axelrod has to chronicle really is a romantic episode in a summer bachelor's life. While his wife is in the country, he and the girl upstairs take a step or two down the primrose path of ordinary theatrical dalliance. Mr. Axelrod has not gone outside the Broadway bailiwick in quest of his plot.

* * *

But he has a refreshing way of telling his story. For the summer bachelor is a very nervous guy with an especially vagrant imagination. In "The Seven Year Itch," it is Mr. Axelrod's whim to let him talk to himself in irritable soliloquies and also to stage some of his most frightening nightmares in the form of interpolated scenes. These are pretty funny discursions on the main theme of the evening. For the summer bachelor, who is also the publisher of paper-bound books, is both contrite and melodramatic. He frightens himself almost to death when he thinks of his wife and when he contemplates the possible consequences of infidelity.

Although Mr. Axelrod's style of humorous improvisation is most refreshing, it is hard to think of "The Seven Year Itch" without Mr. Ewell skipping through it like an apprehensive satyr. Mr. Ewell has been a happy comedian in ordinary small parts for a long time. But the part he plays here is certainly major. He is on stage all evening, contemplating morosely when he is not timidly philandering; and he gives a remarkably comic performance with every detail fondly polished. Mr. Ewell's touch is light, but his sense of invention seems to be fresh and endless. Thanks to a well-written part, we now know that Mr. Ewell is an extraordinary comedian.

Under John Gerstad's direction, with a few looney ideas contributed by Elliott Nugent, the performance as a whole is played with easy expertness. Vanessa Brown, looking very handsome, gives an attractive performance as the girl upstairs who is studying to be a trollop. The mature undertone of her naiveté is wonderfully impudent and winning.

* * *

That bulging comedian, Robert Emhardt, gives another shrewdly satirical performance as a literary psychiatrist. As the wife who is almost forgotten, Neva Patterson is delightful. And George Keane is amusingly aggressive as a professional wolf.

Faced with a familiar task of designing scenery for sin in New York, Frederick Fox has come up with a pleasant variation on the regulation fireplace, divan and bookshelves. "The Seven Year Itch" is a popular comedy written in the interests of hilarity. With Mr. Ewell giving a performance that alternates between the droll and the broad, Mr. Axelrod's play is original and funny.

Journal-American

November 21, 1952

Axelrod Comedy Fails of Fulfillment

By JOHN McCLAIN

THERE are many excrutiatingly funny moments in "The Seven Year Itch," the new George Axelrod comedy which Courtney Burr and Elliott Nugent brought to the Fulton Theatre last night. Tom Ewell, who plays the big part, is a young man inordinately gifted with a comical face and the ability to use it to best advantage.

Vanessa Brown, his vis-a-vis in the proceedings, is highly decorative at all times and succeeds in bringing lightness and some slight plausibility to the role of a young TV actress who threatens to blight his marriage.

But despite their combined efforts one had the feeling that the evening was never quite fulfilled, that the whole thing was a very funny joke being told at too great length by somebody who might blow the punch line.

The Best Around

Mr. Axelrod, who has an unquestioned gift for humor, has devised three acts from the simple situation of a happy husband who in the seventh summer of his married life succumbs briefly to the charms of the young lady who lives upstairs. Hence the outlandish title.

To tell this story the author has employed the device of having Mr. Ewell talk to himself constantly, at the same time enacting scenes which portray the imaginary consequences of his flight from virtue.

In much the manner of Mr. Mitty, the great Thurber character, he envisions the complexities to follow, the joy and anguish and finally the fatal denouement when he confesses all to his wife. The voice of his conscience speaks to him at times from the radio, and he answers back.

All this and much more is hilarious and Mr. Ewell plays it prodigiously well. There is nobody around today who can more skillfully express by the nervous shuffling of feet and hands the sad inadequacy of the average male.

Wearing Thin

But there was always the feeling that the original joke was wearing thin, that it was being sustained with a series of individually amusing though repititious black-outs, and that it was all taking a long time to reach its inevitable conclusion.

Along the line there was an exceptionally funny performance by Robert Emhardt, as a psychoanalyst whose book Ewell is publishing, and sturdy supporting jobs by Neva Patterson, as the wife, and George Keane, as the dream lover.

John Gerstad directed with a fine sense of taste and timing and Frederick Fox has provided a believable set which still permits the complex thought sequences to take place without interrupting the primary action.

This is a very funny show, no doubt about it, but I felt let down.

I didn't think it was funny enough.

Daily Mirror

November 21, 1952

'Seven Year Itch' Is Full Of Delightful Dizziness

By LEE MORTIMER

As "The Seven Year Itch" unwound at the Fulton last evening, it became apparent to all concerned that they were in at the incubation of a hit.

This was most distressing to the assembled members of the Play Assassins' Guild, because whenever a playwright leaves himself wide open with a title such as "The Seven Year Itch," there are sure to be at least several critics who had planned to head their learned essays with such leads as "It began from scratch," or "The Seven Year Itch is poison ivy." Unfortunately for their egos, the pundits had to revise such pre-curtain calculations.

Myself, being only on loan to the drama department during the illness of Bob Coleman, went to the Fulton with no preconceived bon mots. I have no reputation as an incipient George Jean Nathan to uphold, and anyway I thought the light farce was delicious and delightful. So did the cash customers, and so will they for many author's royalty statements to come. Maybe George Axelrod should have called it "The Seven Year Scratch" instead, you should pardon the expression.

Dizzy Theatrics

This zany show is remarkably reminiscent of "Harvey," as when Tom Ewell, who plays a housebroken hubby, gets to talking and arguing with his conscience, which promptly talks back to him over the public address system. That's a sample of the dizzy theatrics in store for you, and I give you my word, you will thoroughly enjoy them. They will talk about Ewell's performance for a long time to come, and the words will bring him much scratch—er,

pardon—too.

Vanessa Brown, a lovely of the flickers, is the over-wise young silly from the sticks who causes the seven-year faithful Ewell to break the lock-step. I know dozens of sleekly girdled dolls like her. Their faces appear on the magazine covers, you see them in TV commercials, rich ancient wolves wine them at El Morocco. Vanessa does a perfect job. I wonder if she ever lived at the Barbizon for Women?

This is where the critic is supposed to give out with the credits, or kudos, as they are called by the Sardi set, I've got plenty for producers Courtney Burr and Elliott Nugent, and director John Gersted, who must be a genius the way he kept the hilarious non-existent conversations with non-present characters moving

And let us not forget Neva Patterson, who handles the chief supporting role of Ewell's wife with aplomb and much more. Such adept troupers as Robert Emhardt and George Keane slayed them, as the saying goes, and a whole bevy of cuties.

New York Post

November 21, 1952

By Richard Watts Jr.

Arrival of 'The Seven Year Itch'

In general, first-night laughter is not to be credited, but the mirth of the first audience at the Fulton Theater last evening had a loud, persistent and highly convincing ring about it. I guess there is no doubt that the merry spectators at the opening performance of the comedy outspokenly known as "The Seven Year Itch" were having a splendid time. If they weren't, I must say they were a convincing crowd of hypocrites, and, since I'd hate to think that of them, it seems to me the new play is destined to be one of the season's popular hits.

To a certain extent, it is my impression that such popularity is deserved. There is quite a lot that is amusing in "The Seven Year Itch," John Gerstad has directed it to capture every possible trace of laughter in it, and then some, and its long and demanding leading role is humorously and skillfully played by the oncoming comedian named Tom Ewell, who is on stage constantly. In addition, it is effectively acted by Vanessa Brown, Neva Patterson, Robert Emhardt, George Keane and a cast of entirely competent lesser players.

Matter of Charm

I can't help thinking, though, that, despite its frequent comic merits, the new play is oddly lacking in charm and any suggestion of spontaneity. It certainly isn't the fault of the cast, and it is most decidedly not for want of trying on the part of playwright and director. But it does seem to press so hard, it is so insistent in its humorous devices, its writing is so routine, and its emphasis on sex so without allure that I thought it missed the engaging quality it was clearly striving for. I should add that I seemed almost alone in my suspicion.

The plot is certainly simple and straightforward enough. A 39-year-old advertising man for a publishing house is left alone in his apartment when his wife goes away for a summer holiday, and he begins to brood over his seven-year marriage and the declining sex life of so ancient a fellow. There is a pretty girl in the apartment upstairs, who had once posed for a photograph in the nude but is terribly innocent, and the husband starts dreaming about having an affair with her and of its possible consequences. Finally, he has the affair, but it doesn't mean anything.

Side Issues

This is the main outline of Mr. Axelrod's story, but sex manages to rear its little head in a few other ways. For example, it seems that the publisher for whom the hero works is planning to bring out a quarter edition of "The Scarlet Letter," which he wants to call "I Was an Adulteress." And there is a psychiatrist, amusingly played by the expert Mr. Emhardt, who has written a book on his subject and likes to talk about it. The playwright can undoubtedly be quite funny about all this at times, but he also strikes me as being a bit laborious in his task.

"The Seven Year Itch" is vastly aided by the shrewd and disarming performance of Mr. Ewell, a growingly effective comedian. Vanessa Brown is pretty and talented as the girl from upstairs, although there were moments when I suspected her of gushing a trifle. Neva Patterson, one of the most charming and interesting young actresses in America, is, as usual, excellent in the small role of the wife, and I still hope she will some day get the important part she deserves. Despite my lack of enthusiasm, I'll be astonished if the new play isn't a big success.

New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

November 21, 1952

Tom Ewell Is Tops in 'Seven Year Itch'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Some highly engaging talents make a light-headed and diverting evening out of "The Seven Year Itch." It is a comedy with a single idea, which it pursues laughably and relentlessly along a route that is half fantasy and half real.

This is Tom Ewell's evening. The comic who was long a favorite in Broadway, even in flops, returns from pictures for this opus, which never takes its biggest spotlight off him. He sustains the interest in this glare, and gives the dizzy little play whimsical life even when its ingenuity is getting pale.

Familiar Situation.

Starting out with a familiar situation, a husband whose family is away for the summer, "The Seven Year Itch" gayly shows how the temporary bachelor vividly imagines himself in a romantic tangle that comes true.

At 38 he is on the verge of thinking his potential wolfdom is on the dwindle. Loneliness lets his dreams come true, as the girl upstairs turns out to be a willingly experimental 22. The husband reacts to his conquest by imagining what horrible reactions his wife will have to discovering his fling. But in the end he is willing to call his philandering quits, as the girl is matured enough to see that marriage, not with him, may be a fair idea.

It is hard to explain how infidelity becomes a profitable and maturing adventure to both parties, but in effect the play is remarkably innocent, and its humor is never distasteful.

Vanessa Brown Returns.

Vanessa Brown also comes back from films to play the girl upstairs, and does so most prettily. She captures the intent directness of this broad-minded, though not forward, miss, and moves through the play with utmost grace.

Neva Patterson is so handsome and good humored a wife for Mr. Ewell, that only her long-term absence could account for his meandering. And George Keane is first rate as the single writer who escorts her about, right under her husband's jealous nose. Robert Emhardt has some perfectly delightful moments as a book writing psychiatrist, who is being published by Ewell, when he gets his mind off his neighbor and on his business.

Audience Laughs.

The cast, and the production in general, do everything they can to make a first-rate offering of the comedy, and for the most part they succeed. Last night's audience, usually discriminating, laughed full throatedly through the evening.

"Electra"

The New York Times

November 20, 1952

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Anyone who wants to know how Sophocles' "Electra" should be acted is directed to the Mark Hellinger Theatre during the rest of this week. For the National Theatre of Greece has stopped by for a visit and, with Katina Paxinou in the leading part, it knows how to bring a venerable classic to majestic life. It opened with the first of two productions last evening.

Since Sophocles' "Electra" is nearly 2,400 years old, Broadway is a little out of touch with the style of Greek tragedy; and, since most Broadway savants do not speak either ancient or modern Greek, they may be forgiven for not knowing much about the spiritual content of those plays. The English translations, prepared by conscientious scholars, are not inviting. They are written either in labored doggerel or uninspired prose.

* * *

The Greek National Theatre's version is a translation into modern Greek by J. Gryparis. Like the original, it consists in some long periods of declamation. Since slaves did all the hard work in Greece in the time of Sophocles, people had more time for talk than most of us do today. Presumably the poetry of the current translation has a beauty that cannot be recognized by people ignorant of the language.

But the production and the performance have a stately beauty that anyone can admire. C. Clonis has transformed the huge stage into the entrance to the royal palace of Argos. Although the setting is enormous, it has a simplicity of design that keeps the production from appearing to be heavy. And the steps provide a wide, dramatic playing area for the chorus and actors.

* * *

Everything is dramatically imposing in the performance — the measured, full-toned acting laden with formal tragedy, the costumes and the lighting. But the orchestrated score composed by Dimitri Mitropoulos and the direction of the chorus are the contributions to this "Electra" that seem most nearly unique. Mr. Mitropoulos' score introduces the tragedy with some eerie string music and some baleful sounds from the kettledrums; it underscores the most dramatic episodes in the legend, and it provides some odes for the chorus to sing. Quite apart from its value as tragic music, the score helps to give the performance depth and eloquence.

This is the first production of a Greek tragedy in this theatregoer's experience that has known what to do with the chorus. Usually the chorus is a rather embarrassed line of confused maidens who wish they knew what they are doing. But the Greek National Theatre has drawn them straight into the heart of the performance as counsel on the one hand and audience on the other.

Their formal movement, their balanced grouping, their synchronized gestures to point up dramatic moments in the play, their awed orchestral chants and their grief-laden singing are extraordinarily beautiful and are a vital part of the performance. Remove the chorus from the stage, and this "Electra" would lose its spiritual magnificence. No doubt the ancient Greek dramatists regarded the chorus as an integral part of the whole tragic experience, as it is in Loukia Sakellariou's choreography and in Dimitri Rondiris' direction.

* * *

The pace of the performance is consciously deliberate, and most of the acting is reserved in style, though forcefully stated. As Electra, the vengeful daughter of the royal family, grief-stricken, resolute in her hatreds and loyalties, Miss Paxinou gives a powerful performance. It is a portrait of tragedy—grim and hideous, for Miss Paxinou always has the courage of her convictions and a voice resonant enough to express them.

As Clytaemnestra, A. Raftopoulou gives a royal performance full of royal authority, and with the stature of a queen. By way of contrast, Rita Myrat's Chrysothemis has the softness and timidity of a princess who is avoiding an epochal feud. The Orestes of Thanos Cotsopoulos, the Paedagogus of J. Apostolides and the Aegisthus of N. Hadziscos have weight and splendor; and the Chorus Leader by H. Zafiriou has the frightened alertness of a woman facing terrible decisions.

Now we know that Sophocles' "Electra" is more than a schoolbook myth. The National Theatre of Greece knows how to transmute it into a tragedy that still retains heroic stature after nearly 2,400 years of squalid history.

"ELECTRA"

Tragedy by Sophocles, translated into modern Greek by J. Gryparis; music by Dimitri Mitropoulos; staged by Dimitri Rondiris; settings by C. Clonis; costumes by Antonios Phocas; choreography by Loukia Sakellariou; presented by Guthrie McClintic and the National Theatre of Greece at the Mark Hellinger Theatre, November 19, 1952. The cast:

Paedagogus.....J. Apostolides
Orestes.....Thanos Cotsopoulos
Electra.....Katina Paxinou
Chrysothemis.....Rita Myrat
Clytaemnestra...A. Raftopoulou
Aegisthus.....N. Hadziscos
Chorus Leader.....H. Zafiriou
Pylades.....Al Deliyannis

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 20, 1952

Paxinou Is an Electric Electra

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Nobody who sees Katina Paxinou play "Electra" will ever forget how she made him feel. In a season increasingly filled with adventures and surprises, this presentation by the Greek National Theater, in its native tongue, is a rare and astonishing experience.

In its own style of grand simplicity, the offering is distinguished by the fact that if you could separate its visual, aural and emotional elements, each would stand without the other two in a purity of achievement all its own.

Elemental Emotions.

The Greek sparseness often seems harsh and chilly to us. Instead of doing things on the stage, the characters listen, feel and express. Their deeds occur elsewhere, and we are met only with the resultant feelings.

The emotions of "Electra" are as elemental and irresistible as fire, air and water. The central figure despairs of avenging her murdered father, when she learns that her brother is dead and cannot help her destroy her villainous mother and uncle. Finally the brother returns, and Electra leads him to killing the murderers.

Electra is, of course, always the central figure of the play. Her devastating emotions are played out on the palace steps, where she learns hopelessness and later the ecstasy of revenge. The chorus echoes and intensifies and broadens her feelings, grouped across the broad steps around her.

Effective Chorus.

This convention of Greek theater, the chorus, is employed with vast effect here. Paxinou is shattering in her performance because she never depicts a superficial or entirely unleashed aspect of her pain. What she does is constantly battle the torture within her, so instead of showing it to you, she is making you feel it.

With all this elevated formality of expression, the actress remains utterly individual, and never becomes just a universal figure of pain or hatred or joy. The big significance of her emotion spreads out around her like ripples on water, in the reflected enlargement of her feelings in the chorus.

One expects Paxinou to cut loose and howl, to make people's hair stand on end. She does much better than that, by never releasing the violence of her character. So you are drawn into the whirlpool of her emotions as surely as if she slowly pulled you there by twisting a rope tied around your neck.

Brilliant Beauty.

The chorus in this production is remarkably well trained, as it parades, half gestures, moans or chants in perfectly phrased unison. It is certainly the second most important character of the play, and again that is true because of Paxinou and her relentless containment of the great tragedy's scope. She sometimes has the fleeting brilliant beauty of Garbo, and her voice seems limitless in tone and range.

The setting for the play has remarkable beauty in sturdy, simple lines, and the lighting follows the tragedy's moods with ingenuity. Twice during the play certain figures in the near dark seem to acquire a luminosity of their own. The Metropoulos score compliments the play's writhing frictions and gives a great deal of emphasis to its rhythms.

Journal American

November 20, 1952

Magnificently Acted And Produced

By JOHN McCLAIN

A SEGMENT of the National Theatre of Greece arrived in these parts last night and presented, under the auspices of Guthrie McClintic, an interpretation of "Electra" by Sophocles, delivered entirely in modern Greek.

Katina Paxinou, memorable from American movies, played the stellar role, and established the fact that she is a profound pantomimist and an actress of depth and diversity.

She was surrounded by a company of extremely capable compatriots. It didn't seem to matter that the language, sounding like a series of sibilant toothpaste commercials, conveyed no meaning to the bulk of the audience.

It was, simply, a pageant of mood and motion, and it told the age-old story with as much impact as though it had been hot from the pen of Mickey Spillane.

Limited Appeal

All this was aided immeasurably by an offstage orchestra which supplied an unobtrusive accompaniment to the evening, and a chorus of shrouded ladies to reveal the principal characters in high relief. In stylized terms this is probably the best production of "Electra" you'll see in your time.

But in terms of entertainment for the average theatre-goer there are bound to be serious reservations. Not many of us speak Greek, few are familiar enough with the plot of "Electra" to follow it without the aid of some dialogue from the actors and it is not a story which will sustain itself simply as a charade.

It emerges, thus, as a magnificently produced and performed spectacle with a limited appeal.

Daily Mirror

November 20, 1952

'Electra' Looks Great But Dialogue Is in Greek!

By ROBERT COLEMAN

By arrangement with ANTA, Guthrie McClintic presented the National Theatre of Greece to America at the Mark Hellinger Theatre last evening. The initial presentation was Sophocles' "Electra," in a modern Greek translation by J. Gryparis, with music by Dimitri Mitropoulos.

Katina Paxinou, known to many theatre and film patrons, is starred in the title role. Assisting her are Thanos Cotsopoulos, as Orestes; A. Raftopoulou, as Clytaemnestra; Rita Myrat, as Chrysothemis; N. Hadziscos, as Aegisthus; J. Apostolides, as Paedagogus.

It is difficult for one unfamiliar with Greek to evaluate properly acting in that language. Even more difficult than acting in French, for at least we can follow some of that. So in this instance we must rely more upon sight than sound for judgment.

From the standpoint of sight, this production looms as an impressive one. In effective scenery by C. Clonis and staged by Dimitri Rondiris, "Electra" becomes a series of vivid episodes. These are skilfully linked together by a chorus led by H. Zafiriou.

A number of the lines appear to be delivered in a singing, almost moaning voice, rather than in declamatory style. The movement is remarkably economical. Moods are achieved by the posture of the body rather than by hand and arm waving. We should say, after our visit to the Hellinger, that the National Theatre of Greece is well worth your consideration.

Incidentally, it is getting so that a drama critic nowadays must be an accomplished linguist to cover the theatre in New York. There is the Renaud-Barrault company from France at the Ziegfeld, and now the Paxinou-Menotis company from Greece at the Hellinger.

We would be kidding you if we pretended that we understood a great deal of the French or any of the Greek. So we can only tell you that they look more interesting than they sound. We think you might like to see them.

If troupes continue arriving this season from other countries, we will have a truly international theatre in Manhattan. We most certainly will be able to make comparisons of our stagecraft with that of others. We appear to be in for a fascinating semester of study.

The Greek National Theatre will alternate "Electra" with "Oedipus Rex." It seems to have an especial fondness for Sophocles, to prefer him over Aeschylus and Euripedes.

DAILY NEWS

November 20, 1952

Greek Theatre Offers 'Electra'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The National Theatre of Greece began a two-week stand at the Mark Hellinger Theatre last evening with a performance of Sophocles' "Electra" in modern Greek. Katina Paxinou intoned the title role.

My report, submitted herewith, can be only two-thirds complete—for, since I don't know the Greek tongue, I can tell only about what struck my eye and ear and nothing concerning what struck my mind. (Things did strike my mind, such as the notion that Mme. Paxinou suffers almost as much as Margaret Sullavan does in "The Deep Blue Sea," but these are irrelevancies.)

Excellent Chorus

"Electra" is mounted in a handsome setting of the front of a palace and all the steps leading down from it or up to it. Here Electra appears, to tell of her classic griefs and hopes of revenge. She is attended and listened to by an extraordinarily well-disciplined chorus of 16 young ladies whose groupings, poses and chants are remarkable for their grace and rigid formality. There is practically no physical action—for Mme. Paxinou seems content not to stir things up the way Judith Anderson would.

Mitropoulos Music.

To one like myself, completely ignorant of the language, the greatest pleasure of the performance is what falls upon the ear—for Dimitri Mitropoulos has composed for the production some baleful and fascinating music as a background for the drama and the choruses. And Mme. Paxinou has a voice of great range, color and intonation. She has need of it, for this translation by J. Gryparis is largely a monologue running about an hour and three-quarters.

Next week, the National Theatre of Greece will offer "Oedipus Tryannus" with Alexis Minotis, Mme. Paxinou's co-star, in the title role. Minotis was not in the cast of "Electra."

New York Post

November 20, 1952

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Greek Theater Offers 'Electra'

Tonight a play is going to open that will be acted in English, and it is likely to seem a little odd to us erudite and international-minded drama critics. Having improved ourselves in the French tongue through a couple of impressive sessions with Jean-Louis Barrault's brilliant company from Paris, we turned jauntily to modern Greek last evening, when the National Theater of Greece offered a version in that language of Sophocles' "Electra" at the Mark Hellinger, with Katina Paxinou appearing in the title role.

Mme. Paxinou is, of course, a familiar figure to American audiences, who have seen her on the stage in "Hedda Gabler" and "The House of Bernarda Alba" and in the films in "For Whom the Bell Tolls" and "Mourning Becomes Electra." I must admit that, in English, she has always seemed to me a passionate but curiously unbelievable actress. It is clear that she is far better equipped for the classic drama of her native land, and, as the embittered and vengeful daughter of Agamemnon, she is unquestionably a powerful and impressive figure.

Force and Authority

Looking strikingly like Judith Anderson and playing with some of that magnificent performer's elemental force, Mme. Paxinou dominates the stage with such authority that it is obvious the unfortunate Clytemnestra hasn't a chance against her. The very qualities that make Katina Paxinou unconvincing in the modern drama add to her impressiveness in classic Greek tragedy. She always seems just a trifle larger than life, and her ability to tear a passion to tatters in the grand manner equips her handsomely for the role of the Sophocles heroine.

Since "Electra" is a static play, despite the fluid movement of the women of the chorus, and, of course, a declamatory one, it does not make for the liveliest theatergoing in the world for audiences unfamiliar with modern Greek. Fortunately, however, its narrative is simple and elemental and is, I imagine, well-known to most people who go to plays, so it is by no means difficult to follow in the current performance, and the National Theater of Greece is clearly a distinguished organization worthy of the country and civilization it represents.

The production has been staged by Dimitri Rondiris with dignity and austerity, and the power of the drama is captured in the work of both the principals and the chorus. The proper quality is maintained in the setting by C. Clonis, in Antonios Phocas' costumes, and, particularly, in the effective background music composed by Dimitri Mitropoulos. There can be no doubt of the general impressiveness of the visitors from Greece.

"Electra" is, of course, one of the great plays of world dramatic literature, and I wish I were in a position to tell you about the quality of the translation into modern Greek that has been made by J. Gryparis. All I can say is that the performance has both force and classic dignity and that Mme. Paxinou brings a dynamic power to her playing. It is, I think, good for us to see the work of the national theaters of lands that regard the drama as a noble art.

New York Herald Tribune

November 20, 1952

'Electra'

By WALTER F. KERR

THIS is turning into international month along Broadway. With the Barrault troupe happily established at the Ziegfeld, Guthrie McClintic, in association with the American National Theater and Academy, has now brought us the National Theater of Greece in two of its most distinguished productions. The first of these, Sophocles' "Electra" in a modern Greek rendering by J. Gryparis, opened at the Mark Hellinger Wednesday night, and it offers the theater student an always distinguished, frequently vivid, insight into the tragic methods of the past.

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The curtain rises on an enormously evocative image—the sombre, hauntingly lighted doorways of the palace of Atreus. Against a brooding musical background, the lamentations of Electra—longing for the return of a brother who will avenge their father's murder—are heard. Soon Sophocles' passionately embittered heroine, in the stunning person of Katina Paxinou, slips out from the dim recesses of the curse-ridden palace.

Miss Paxinou begins her work quietly. She has even a shade of tenderness to show toward the weak-willed Chrysothemis, that pliant and soft-spoken sister who cannot be brought to feel the need for vengeance. As the play moves forward, and Electra's hopes for retribution seem doomed to defeat, the actress increases her intensity. Her eyes flash fire as she deals with the murderous Clytemnestra, her lip curls above bared teeth as she fiercely contemplates taking the law into her own hands. To the psychological complexities of this demanding role Miss Paxinou brings a wealth of visual and vocal beauty.

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It is possible to have minor reservations about Wednesday evening's performance of the part. There are times when Miss Paxinou seems to be remembering an earlier performance, rather than forging a fresh one out of the urgent inspiration of the moment. Especially is this true of those long passages in which Electra must listen, tormented, to the cynical defense which Clytemnestra sets up for the murder of Agamemnon. And there are other moments, including several in which Electra is left alone with the chorus, when the star's vocal usage tends to run toward plainsong rather than passion. But we are immediately compensated by the very moving form which Miss Paxinou has found for the episode in which she clasps her brother's ashes to her breast, and again by the furious exultation of her climactic triumph. In all, this is a performance of taste and stature, and we must be grateful for the opportunity we have of seeing it.

Miss Paxinou is tremendously aided by the vigor and resonance which Thanos Cotsopoulos brings to the role of Orestes, and it is in the showy recognition scene between brother and sister that the present production achieves its strongest emotional impact. The Clytemnestra of A. Raftopoulou is regal and insinuating; there is, though, an underlying softness about Miss Raftopoulou's work which keeps the clash between this demonic mother and her challenging daughter from achieving its full sting, its maximum venom.

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Perhaps nothing in the production at the Hellinger is more illuminating than its use of the traditional Greek chorus. Both the extreme formality of this device, and its present-day unfamiliarity, tend to make it a stumbling block in most contemporary productions of Greek tragedy. Here there is a happy acceptance of its dramatic, rather than its merely musical value to the action of the play. Moving simply and fluidly, speaking in perfect unison, the chorus —under the choreographic guidance of Loukia Sakellariou—again and again adds urgency to the mounting tension, gives point and poignance to the sufferings of the principals by responding so sensitively to each new mood. This "Electra" finds genuine theatrical excitement in the chorus' sudden approach to the audience or in the apprehension with which it waits outside the Atrean palace while delayed justice is done.

Sophocles has been well served by an accomplished acting company, and Broadway has been well served by Mr. McClintic's determination that this impressive modern work, born of a magnificent earlier tradition, should be brought to these shores.

"Amphitryon" & "Les Fourberies de Scapin"

New York Post

November 21, 1952

By Vernon Rice

French Troupe Offers a Comedy Bill

Proof was given last night at the Ziegfeld, where S. Hurok is presenting the Madeleine Renaud-Jean-Louis Barrault Company, that it is a decided advantage for actors to be French when playing Moliere. French and lots of it.

Taking an opposite turn away from its last offering, the dramatization of Franz Kafka's "Le Proces," the Parisian troupe once again displayed its versatility and wide range with two works from the 17th century writer, "Amphitryon" and "Les Fourberies de Scapin" ("Scapin's Pranks") and put to shame most Anglo Saxon performers who have tried to play the Master.

Honors are shared in the new presentation, which will run through Saturday evening, between the playwright, the players and the late designer, Christian Berard, who died on the eve of "Scapin's" first performance in Paris. Berard, possibly, has a slight edge, for his contribution is more visibly arresting. He gave Moliere's blank verse reworking of Plautus' bedroom comedy of the Gods a spun-sugar celestial quality not seen, probably, even in heaven with his sets and costumes.

He then dispelled the myth that grey is not a humorous color in "Scapin." The shade and variations of it dominate the stage at all times during the farce and never do they cast gloom.

The bill is one of startling contrasts. "Amphitryon," not too far astray in story line from the version S. N. Behrman built from Giraudoux' for the Lunts back in 1937, is in turn lyrical and classical in style of presentation while in "Les Fourberies de Scapin", the company, under the late Louis Jouvet's direction, makes it the Commedia dell 'Arte romp Moliere intended.

Through both Jean-Louis Barrault has an actor's holiday, first as Mercury in "Amphitryon" and later playing the servant Scapin, meddling in the romantic entanglements of two young couples.

He jumps, leaps and twirls, and, at times, mugs, but always in the proper style of the vehicle in which he is appearing.

His wife, Madeleine Renaud, is seen only in "Amphitryon," as Alcemene, the wife of the warrior desired by Jupiter. She delights with her outwardly fragile, innocent ways hiding a sly, knowing humor.

Jean Desailly is a dashing and handsome Jupiter, and Jacques Dacqmine, who seemed to be fighting laryngitis, is a properly confused and angered mortal in the title role.

Marie-Helene Daste and Charles Mahieu appear only in "Scapin" and they bring highly comic characterizations to the gambol. The other players seem to jump from one acting chore to the other with the ease of pole vaulters hurdling a small fence.

For contrast, color and enjoyment the Moliere bill tops the previous offerings, and one's lack of knowledge of the French language does not hinder appreciation of the beauty of Christian Berard's decor and costumes nor his pleasure of the comic appropriateness of the Francis Poulenc score for "Amphitryon" and Henri Sauguet's for "Scapin."

"AMPHITRYON" and "LES FOURBERIES DE SCAPIN"

"Amphitryon", play by Moliere; music by Francis Poulenc; decor and costumes by Christian Berard; staged by Jean-Louis Barrault; followed by "Les Fourberies de Scapin" by Moliere; music by Henri Sauguet; decor and costumes by M. Berard; staged by Louis Jouvet; presented by S. Hurok at the Ziegfeld Theatre, November 20, 1952. The casts:

"Amphitryon"

Mercure..Jean-Louis Barrault
Le Char de la Nuit.....
Pierre Sonnier, Serge Perrault
La Nuit.....Elina Labourdette
Sosie.....Jean-Pierre Granval
Jupiter.....Jean Desailly
Alcmene.....Madeleine Renaud
Cleanthis.....Anne Carrere
Amphitryon...Jacques Dacqmine
Naucrates.....Regis Outin
Posicles...Jean-Claude Michel
Argatiphontidas.....
Jean-Francois Calve

"Les Fourberies de Scapin"

Octave.....Gabriel Cattand
Sylvestre.....Jean Juillard
Nerine.....Marie-Helene Daste
Scapin....Jean-Louis Barrault
Hyacinthe.....Anne Carrere
Argante.....Charles Mahieu
Geronte.....Pierre Bertin
Leandre...Jean-Francois Calve
Carle.....Regis Outin
Zerbinette.....Simone Valere

Herald Tribune

NEW YORK

November 21, 1952

Renaud-Barrault Group Gives Pair of Moliere Plays in French

By Bert McCord

MADELEINE RENAUD Jean-Louis Barrault and their French company, who won such a warm welcome from New Yorkers for their first two offerings, last night turned to two Moliere plays, "Amphitryon" and "Les Fourberies de Scapin." Once again the Parisian players were given rapt attention and an enthusiastic response, but the evening as a whole was a decided letdown in pace and consequently in entertainment value for those unable to follow the rapidity of their spoken French.

It is therefore only to the fluent Francophiles of this city and to the students of the theater that the Moliere productions can be wholeheartedly recommended, even though the farce about the glib and unscrupulous Scapin will delight any audience. It is preceded by the long and talkative court play, "Amphitryon," which you may never see better produced, but which you might well have been able to get along without. Neither Mlle. Renaud nor M. Barrault are at their best in this one, with the latter giving a surprisingly pedestrian interpretation of Mercury, and the former seeming just a bit repetitive in the gestures and facial expressions which she used to such advantage in "Les Fausses Confidences."

* * *

It is Jean-Pierre Granval, as Sosie, who wins the hearts of the audiences attending "Amphitryon." This, of course, has always been one of Moliere's most delightful creations and it is probably a tribute to M. Barrault's devotion to his company and the idea of ensemble-playing that he passed it up himself. As it is, M. Granval comes into his own with it. Vigorous nods of praise should go to Jean Desailly and Jacques Dacqmine for their portrayals of Jupiter and Amphitryon.

A striking setting was designed for "Amphitryon" by the late Christian Berard, but although it is an unusual one, it gave the impression of enveloping the play, rather than projecting it. An extremely apt accompanying score by Francis Poulenc was played at times as if the orchestra was covering for a soprano with no high note. Had the play been done in English and been readily intelligible, this might well have been an asset instead of a distraction.

For "Les Fourberies de Scapin," which was staged by the late Louis Jouvet, the company doffed the frills and lace and respectful restraint of "Amphitryon" and plunged into the low-comedy antics with a rewarding vengeance. In this one, from the moment that M. Barrault, in the title role, bobbed up over the stair-lined parapet, he convinced every one that he and you were in for a frolic. His personality and style are at their most felicitous in this farce about the two ardent young lovers, the two contrary fathers and the roguish valet who schemes to set them all right.

Because the curtain for the farce was late in rising, it was impossible for this reviewer to see the entire performance. In addition to M. Barrault, however, it was apparent from the outset that Pierre Bertin and Charles Mahieu were on their way to giving rich impersonations of the two fathers.

The New York Times
November 21, 1952

French Troupe Offers Double Bill

It can no longer come under the heading of news this morning that the Madeleine Renaud-Jean-Louis Barrault acting troupe from France is one of the finest that any student of the theatre, regardless of the condition of his French, could care to see. Last night at the Ziegfeld Theatre, the company, having already demonstrated its versatility as well as its virtuosity in Marivaux, Prevert and Kafka, took up Molière. In a double bill "presented in homage to the father of the French classical theatre," the players now are offering "Amphitryon" and "Les Fourberies de Scapin ("Scapin's Pranks") and another thoroughly impressive session is provided.

The plays by the great playwright-actor show him in two phases of his work. "Amphitryon" is, the historians tell us, Moliere the Courtier, written as it was at the behest of Louis XIV to help the monarch in wooing a new love. Based on the play by the Roman Plautus, who in turn had fashioned it on a Greek text, it tells how Jupiter, enamored of the mortal Alcmene, wife of the Theban general, Amphitryon, decides to come to earth to make love to her. To aid him in his earthly romance, Jupiter disguises himself as the lady's husband and brings Mercury along, who, in turn, masquerades as Sosie, the valet of the army leader. Complications ensue therefrom when the real husband and servant return.

Although "Amphitryon" clearly is something outside of this world, it is played with a sincerity that happily underlines the comedy of the situation. For these actors are masters of make-believe. They revel in the pleasure of playing theatre and, under the directing hand of M. Barrault, there not only is fun for all but also a pictorial grandeur which has been beautifully abetted by the late scene and costume designer, Christian Bérard.

M. Barrault, himself, appears as Mercury-Sosie and he renders the role with the exquisite pantomime and dancing movement which marks his technique. As Mercury, he is aware that he is not of this earth and his lightness afoot and nonchalance make his knowledge plain. As Sosie he is a tormenting god who is having a fling at the expense of his mortal counterpart, played with excellent drollery by Jean-Pierre Granval. For the real Sosie is a simple fellow and the complications of his position are bewildering, to say the least. Mlle. Renaud is delicately radiant as the wife, while Jacques Dacqmine is the military man, confounded, agitated and yet sturdy in his dilemma.

Jean Desailly plays the roving Jupiter with the determination and passion of his Olympian prerogative and Anne Carrère's Cleanthis is correctly simple and befuddled.

As for "Les Fourberies de Scapin," it is a fine example of Molière, the farce writer. The plot, full of twists and turns, deals with two young men who, in the absence of their fathers, marry the young women of their hearts without proper parental permission. Both couples are in financial straits and must depend upon Scapin to connive and swindle the respective fathers of the necessary funds. There is a trick solution to everything at the end.

Unfortunately, the audience last night did not seem aware of the New York custom of the early curtain for the benefit of morning paper reviewers. Under the circumstances only a bit of "Scapin" could be seen, but even in hasty retreat it was clear that matters were, as was to be expected, completely in control. L. F.

New York World-Telegram
and
The [illegible] Sun
November 22, 1952

A Double Moliere And Gloom Chaser

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The current bill of the Barrault company at the Ziegfeld may well be the long-term favorite of most audiences. The double bill of Moliere plays is gay and bright on an elevation we far too rarely see. Despite the many brilliant individual contributions to the production, the program truly seems to star the company as a unit.

The contrast between the two plays is dramatic in itself, as "Amphitryon" reveals all the elegance and sophistication of Moliere's court plays, and "Les Fourberies de Scapin" is as earthy, if by no means as simple, as a Punch and Judy in the park.

Decors by Berard.

Both the plays are done in decors by Christian Berard, the brilliant designer who contributed so richly to the French theater. The offerings from a physical point of view are staggering to our customarily limited expectations. They are conceived with such imagination, and executed with such chic and knowledge of the stage, that they transport the onlooker into a world of another time and place.

"Amphitryon" of course is a version of the familiar story of Jupiter's visit to earth when he wooed and won Alcmene by making himself into a duplicate of her husband. Here Madeleine Renaud is the exquisite object of both mortal and immortal attentions, dainty and delicate, and so utterly different from the worldly, languid, rhythmic wanton she was playing earlier this week in "The Trial."

Barrault Plays Mercury.

Barrault is Mercury, and Jean-Pierre Granval is a broadly comical Sosie, while Jean Desailly and Jacques Dacqmine devide honors as the earthly and heavenly versions of the husband.

The play starts in a welter of night sky, studded with stars, then changes before your eyes to an endless series of columns that pierce daylight clouds.

The costumes here have a distinct dramatic effect on the momentum of the play, as the pastels of the earlier sequences build through a series of luminous reds to the climax of Jupiter's great splashing golden star.

In "Les Fourberies de Scapin" the stage is heighened with two long flights of gray steps.

Ingenious Scamp.

Barrault is radiant, fleet and brilliant as the ingenious scamp who straightens out the love affairs of his master and his friends. He is like a man at a throttle, who keys the whirligig comedy to boisterous animation, racing uphill, sliding down, or leaping from the peak of one bump to another.

"Les Fourberies" is a rare example of what this fortunately sympathetic and extraordinarily integrated company can do. The panorama of action and mood and style is what counts. Yet the only way to describe it is through details, none of which is isolated in performance.

There is for instance the moaning and mountainous waddle of Marie-Helene Daste, who a couple of days ago was slinking about as one of the most fleshy of sluts. Then there is a most difficult scene of Simone Valere's in which, to accent action both before and after, she must indulge in hysterical laughter for what seems an endless period.

This is an evening that bubbles with humor. The art of acting in its infinite facets here overcomes the language difference with nearly as much clarity as instrumental music.

DAILY NEWS

November 21, 1952

French Players in Double Moliere

By ROBERT SYLVESTER

Well, the sad fact is that I do not dig a classic called "Amphitryon." I can't understand the original Greek legend, the Moliere period comedy baffles me, I thought the Lunts were ridiculous in their revision, and the fool thing left me cold even when Cole Porter put it to music as "Out Of This World." But, alas, the Jean-Louis Barrault and Madeleine Renaud company from Paris did it again at the Ziegfeld last night.

Nonetheless, the newest import is welcome because it offers one of the last settings by the late Christian Berard. The dead genius, who became widely known here far too late in life, this time has incongruously built a set based on the principle of Corot's light tunnel. His setting seems to reach for miles, backward and afar, in a series of graduated and serrated ovals.

The Simple Art.

For change from dark to light, he merely pushes out a series of Greek pillars in perspective and lifts his dark ovals to reveal lighter ovals. Simple? Sure, but also wondrously inventive and highly exciting.

So inventive and exciting, in fact, that Berard's contribution pretty well dwarfs both story and acting. As to story, it concerns the traveling salesman (Jupiter) and the farmer's daughter (Mlle. Renaud) and a brief roll in the hay of which a goodly salesman (and surely a godly Jupiter) ought to be ashamed.

That's as much of it as I have ever been able to analyze. The program uses three pages of straight American words. You may take your descriptive choice.

An Added Prank.

"Amphitryon" was followed by another Moliere frolic called "Les Fourberies de Scapin" (Scapin's Pranks). This is closer to our own idea of pantomime farce and aside from Barrault's heroic work, after a hard task in "Amphitryon," it also has two fine character comedy interpretations by Charles Mahieu and Pierre Bertin.

Like the preceding legend, "Scapin" is played well forward on the stage and again the Berard setting is pretty much wasted. But Berard's "Scapin" setting apparently was done while Barrault kept an eye on costs and, at this stage, the set appears a little tired. It consists mainly of two staircases and some limp gray drapes.

"Le Proces"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

November 18, 1952

'Le Proces'

By WALTER F. KERR

AS A change of pace from the light, lilting, and magnificently styled foolery of their opening bill at the Ziegfeld, the actors of the Jean-Louis Barrault-Madeleine Renaud troupe are now immersed in the grotesque, harrowing, and guilt-ridden world of Franz Kafka.

Kafka's most celebrated novel, "The Trial," has long since found a vast and voluble band of enthusiastic admirers in this country, but efforts to dramatize it for the English-speaking stage have thus far failed. M. Barrault has had the courage to attempt his own acting version—with the assistance of Andre Gide—and, discounting the language difficulty and certain backstage mishaps which beset the multi-scened, intricately mounted piece Monday evening, it emerges as a strikingly graphic, sometimes terrifying, theatrical experience.

The play opens as Joseph K., an extremely ordinary bank clerk, rouses himself from sleep, meticulously tears a page off his wall calendar, and prepares himself for a routine day's work. Before he can leave his shabby room in a boarding house, two plainclothesmen have unaccountably walked in on him and served notice that he is to stand trial. No mention is made of any specific crime. Try as he may, this nonentity of an Everyman can never discover the evil he is supposed to have done.

Though he pleads his way through several frightening interrogations, though he shouts his innocence in a court of law, though he piteously begs of a priest some clew to his guilt, Joseph K. never does identify his crime. At the end, he simply accepts it, and submits to execution.

The meaning of the play—and the nature of this inescapable guilt—is, in the manner of such adventures into symbolism, open to a variety of interpretations. The inoffensive central figure may be read psychoanalytically, as the victim of a guilt complex; religiously, as a man pursued by original sin; or socially, as an average human being unfairly dealt with by the machinery of law.

Barrault, who plays Joseph K. hauntingly, would seem to read it in purely social terms, and any analysis of the play's verbal impact will have to be left to some one whose French is more fluent than this reviewer's. What is perfectly clear—and all the time—at the Ziegfeld is that Barrault is a performer of infinite technical variety and genuine emotional stature. His embarrassed flailings as he tries to get a hearing for himself are honestly touching. The pathetic anxiety with which he acts out his plight for a sympathetic neighbor is brilliantly mimed.

And, best of all, he is startlingly rich in humor. Give the average actor a symbolic role and you can see the glaze come over his eyes. You can watch him pad himself with "layers of meaning" and what you are almost bound to get is a pompous, pretentious performance. Barrault plays his man as though unconscious of any elaborate and imposed significance. He is conscious only of the sharp, direct reality of day-to-day events, of Joseph K's simple desperation as a human being. What might have been a mere figurehead comes to unaffected, altogether compelling life.

Madeleine Renaud is skimped in this venture, appearing briefly as the wife of a much sought-after lawyer. But her few moments count. The contemptuous patience with which she allows her husband to paw her hand, the ironic silence with which she endures the nightmare spectacle of Joseph's mocking trial, tell her entire story, and fragmentary impressions become quietly memorable ones.

Jean Desailly, Regis Outin, and Jaques Dacqmine give telling performances in lesser roles, and the complex decor which Felix Labisse has provided would seem extraordinarily effective. It was handicapped by a good many muffed cues last evening, and there were times when you felt that the company was only a hair's breadth ahead of the carpenters. That the performance as a whole remained steady, controlled, and entirely engrossing was simply further measure of this visiting company's astonishing resourcefulness.

"LE PROCES"

Play by Andre Gide and Jean-Louis Barrault, based on the novel by Franz Kafka; staged by M. Barrault; decor by Felix Labisse; presented by S. Hurok at the Ziegfeld Theatre, November 17, 1952. The cast:

Joseph.....Jean-Louis Barrault
Franz.....Jean Juillard
Wilhelm....Jean-Claude Michel
Madame Grubach..Simone Matil
Le Brigadier.....Beauchamp
Mademoiselle Burstner.....
Anne Carerre
Le Bourreau..Jacques Dacqmine
La Laveuse..Marie-Helene Daste
L'Huissier.....Jean Desailly
L'Etudiant Berthold.....
Jean-Pierre Granval
La Jeune Fille.....
Elina Labourdette
Le Prepose Aux Reseignements..
Jean-Francois Calve
L'Homme.....Jacques Galland
L'Oncle.....Pierre Bertin
Leni.....Madeleine Renaud
Block.....Regis Outin
Le Directeur-Adjoint.....
Gabriel Cattand
Le Judge D'Instruction.....
Charles Mahieu

New York Post

November 18, 1952

By Richard Watts Jr.

Kafka and the Visitors from Paris

As the second offering of their local season at the Ziegfeld, Jean-Louis Barrault's brilliant company from Paris last night appeared in "Le Proces," the adaptation that Andre Gide and M. Barrault made from Franz Kafka's celebrated and frightening allegory of justice known in English as "The Trial." Splendidly acted by the distinguished French star and his fellow visitors and conceived in strikingly imaginative fashion, there can be no doubt of its fascination as stagecraft, even though it is a difficult play with or without the language barrier.

It is, I imagine, chiefly as stagecraft that the drama must be appreciated in this vicinity, but that is not to say that it is lacking in pertinence or timeliness for us. As almost everyone seems to know, Kafka was telling in "The Trial" of a man who was accused, tried, convicted and executed without ever finding out what crime he was charged with, or, indeed, ever having reason to believe that his accusers were aware of the charge. To that extent, the drama based on the novel seems simple enough. But there is far more to it than that.

Leyels of Concern

For it becomes apparent that the author was concerned with several levels of meaning in his allegory. He was concerned, first of all, with the administration of justice in a totalitarian world and, by extension, in a world that has learned the worst lessons of totalitarianism. On the second level, however, he was apparently considering the plight of a man facing a God that he doesn't quite understand and a divine justice that is wrapped in obscurity for him. In the third place, there is the problem of man facing his own obscurely tormented conscience.

All of this, I submit, would make a fairly difficult play for local audiences even if it were done in the most impeccable English. For those who, like this reviewer, have more than a little trouble with the intricacies of the French tongue, it obviously presents problems that are nothing short of insuperable. I suspect, too, that the difficulties are somewhat more than linguistic As nearly as I could discover, Andre Gide and Jean-Louis Barrault have written a play that is philosophically fascinating but dramatically rather less so.

The Nightmare

Nevertheless, if "Le Proces" has its own troubles as a play, the manner in which it has been staged is enough to make it worth seeing by serious followers of the theater. It is a nightmare tale that the drama has to tell and it succeeds in becoming increasingly nightmareish in the manner of telling as its haunted protagonist, Josef K., strives with growing desperation to learn the nature of the charge that has been brought against him. Beginning almost realistically, the staging develops a style of mounting terror that is brilliantly managed.

As the protagonist, M. Barrault has a role of immense difficulty that keeps him on the stage almost constantly and makes vast emotional and intellectual demands upon him, and he never ceases to be a moving and credible figure. The other roles are of far less importance, but it is plain that the Barrault company is composed of uniformly skillful actors. This time Madeleine Renaud has a small role but she manages it admirably. "Le Proces" is a most complex theater adventure, but its nightmare style is genuinely haunting.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 18, 1952

'The Trial' Soars Out of This World

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Simply to have conceived of "The Trial," as Jean-Louis Barrault did, seems foolhardy on a gigantic scale. To have succeeded as he has, is superhuman. This play and its production is challenging on a scale that dazzles.

A study of innocence, it illustrates what Kafka, the author of the original novel, terms our age of absurdity. As a tangible nightmare, the play tells of a simple man accused of a crime no one will describe. Harrowed by universal indifference to his plight, he can only get advice to confess, and finally he is executed.

Mr. Kafka seems to be saying that in our day innocence has become a negative quality, practically a state of emptiness, and is consequently impossible to prove.

Beyond the Possible.

Mr. Barrault dramatized the book, with Andre Gide, and has produced it on a scale of physical complication and imaginative deviousness which defies description. It soars out of the realm of the possible in our local present-day theater. Even as the most advanced experiment it compares with theater here the way an ocean liner compares to a canoe.

The stage is divided into several playing areas, in each of three dimensions, sideways, back from the footlights, and up from the floor. Various panels, curtains and screens expose varying numbers of these areas, as the play's action spreads and contracts like a bellows.

Once again the Barrault company reveals an uncanny coordination in performance, through its sensitive, cooperative timing. It also continues here its series of penetrating characterizations, wholly illuminated by shrewd tones and selective postures.

Mr. Barrault himself, as the victim, accomplishes what sounds impossible, something I have never seen done before. He is never off the stage, and is vocally and visually the central focus of attention every minute. He plays brilliantly, yet he never dominates the play. There is not a moment when you feel anything but his suppression by a much more powerful force than he is.

The eerie mood of the adventure is ingeniously set, soon after the curtain's rise. A policeman, come to arrest Barrault, talks with his mouth full of food, and the obscene noise is revolting and sinister. The victim is being questioned at the police station, and his two guards sway in unison behind him, making his reality seem abnormal.

Several times the sheer drama of some physical device of expression set last night's audience to applauding. Barrault walks up several flights of stairs in weary pantomime, without moving much more than a level yard. He walks with leaden exhaustion in a manner which so convinces the onlooker that the wall behind him is moving, that people stood up to see the treadmill, which of course was non-existent.

A Meaningful Whole.

But the details are only masterly in adding up to a meaningful whole. This is a play which calls for preparation, unless you know Mr. Kafka and speak French. The program has an exhaustive synopsis, a considerate aspect of Mr. Hurok's presentation of the troupe.

In a time when we have repeatedly seen people castigated by random accusations from which they had not even the recourse of an explanation, "The Trial" is a shattering insight into how it feels to be the victim.

The New York Times

November 18, 1952

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Having begun with the leisurely eighteenth century, Jean-Louis Barrault and his company have come up to the neurotic twentieth with considerable éclat in their second production, "Le Procés," which was put on at the Ziegfeld last evening. For "Le Procés" is an adaptation of Franz Kafka's "The Trial," dramatized by André Gide and M. Barrault, and acted by about as many French actors as you are likely to crowd into a trans-Atlantic steamer at one time.

Some people regard Kafka's "The Trial" as the most important novel written in our century. Superficially, it is a satire on justice that, since Kafka's death twenty years ago, has come sensationally into its own as the macabre portrait of justice under totalitarian regimes.

* * *

It is the diabolical record of Joseph K., a bank executive, who is mysteriously arrested and shot into the maelstrom of the courts without ever discovering what he is accused of. The moment he is arrested, he is a condemned man, drawn further and further into the vortex of guilt and punishment.

In our time this seems to state with horrifying coldness the plight of the individual in a totalitarian regime. But the contemporary application of Kafkas' thesis only shows how profoundly he struck on an idea that has become a reality. For "The Trial" is about something more universal. It represents a search for the truth by a man who can see no meaning in life. According to Soma Morgenstern, the Austrian sage, Kafka was a mystic who did not believe in God, and "The Trial" is the most devastating work of art of the century.

* * *

Criticism of the Gide and Barrault adaptation would come with the best grace from someone who understands spoken French fluently, and that eliminates this reviewer. But anyone with eyes in his head can see that the adapters have made a theatrical show with expressionistic overtones out of a serious work of art written in a classical style. M. Barrault's production and performance illustrate Joseph K's horrible nightmare. But in this case illustration is less vivid than a serious evocation of the theme might be if "The Trial" were dramatized with cold dignity. "Le Procés" is a trivial rendering of a profound idea.

* * *

By an ingenious arrangement, Félix Labisse has put together a production that chronicles Joseph K's doomed odyssey from his room to the court, to the office and to all the places he visits in search of salvation. M. Barrault, dressed in formal day clothes, plays Joseph K like the central figure in a ghastly ballet. Just about everyone else in the company, including Madeleine Renaud, completes a capacious scenario by playing the other figures in the haunted narrative.

Some of the performance is in the expressionistic vein that was worked in Europe thirty years ago, and some of it is stylized like "The Dybbuk." It is hardly original today. And it resembles a mime's fleeting impressions of Kafka without conveying much of Kafka's sincerity as the prophet of the damned.

"Le Procés" is a theatre man's masquerade—ingenious and facile, but trifling in comparison with the shattering quality of the novel from which it is derived.

DAILY NEWS

November 18, 1952

Barrault's Company Exciting in Adaptation of Kafka's 'The Trial'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The resourcefulness and fine quality of the French repertory company headed by Jean-Louis Barrault and Madeleine Renaud is now apparent. For the second bill of their engagement at the Ziegfeld Theatre they offered last evening an absorbing, vivid and theatrically expert production of "Le Proces"—"The Trial."

This piece has been adapted by Andre Gide and Barrault from Franz Kafka's novel, about the man named K. who sought justice in this most imperfect of worlds. This is no easy scenario to adapt for the stage, but Gide and Barrault have done it triumphantly. A third collaborator on the work is Felix Labisse, the scene designer, whose setting, though unpretentious, is wonderfully mobile and effective.

Brilliant Acting.

Barrault plays the man K. and it is a brilliant, prolonged piece of acting. He is never off the stage, from the time two detectives walk into his room and tell him he is under arrest until, at the final moment, he is executed without ever knowing of what he has been accused.

It is a most ironic and cynical comedy about man's view—or lack of view—of justice. The company is indeed a company, for almost every member of a large cast appears in some vivid characterization—yet, far from being individualists on the stage, they are working delightfully together.

I can mention only a few of them here: Mlle. Renaud as the cheating wife of an old lawyer; Beauchamp—that's all he calls himself, Beauchamp—as the lawyer; Jean Desailly as a law court attendant; Pierre Bertin as K.'s uncle, and, perhaps best of all next to Barrault, Jacques Dacqmine as a painter who knows all about justice.

Journal-American

November 18, 1952

Just What's Kafka's Play All About?

By JOHN McCLAIN

FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS, ma petite, it will not be enough merely to understand French when you visit the Madeleine Renaud—Jean-Louis Barrault Company at the Ziegfeld Theatre.

A knowledge of French will help, of course, since nothing else is spoken, but you also had better come equipped with some impression of Franz Kafka's strange philosophy and what can happen to it when it is interpreted by Andre Gide and Jean-Louis Barrault.

For their latest offering, "Le Proces" ("The Trial"), M. Barrault and his troupers have succeeded in lowering a dense Gallic fog over the premises; the whole thing is performed with taste and authority and ingeniously mounted, but I will defy any two people, including Herr Kafka and M. Gide, to tell me what it's all about.

But Why?

An apparently normal young bank clerk's apartment is invaded one morning and he is arrested. Nobody ever makes a clear charge against him and he is allowed to pursue his duties, but the threat of this arrest hovers over him until he, too, begins to believe he is guilty of something.

This leads him to seek aid from every available source, friends of the judiciary, a lawyer, and finally a chaplain.

The cleric comes up with the rather unsatisfactory advice that the best thing he could have done was to plead guilty in the first place. He thereupon submits passively when two strange characters overtake him in the back.

There are any number of symbols flying around in this orbit and everybody has his own interpretation. Maybe it's a case against intolerance, but if it is it could certainly have been stated in more interesting and less oblique terms.

Acting Fine

Perhaps it is the age-old story of the futility of life: We are all born condemned to death; no appeal will save us. I'll buy that, but again I think it has been told better before.

There also is the more basic and simple interpretation: there ain't no justice. I don't believe that. I think if two cops walked into the apartment of a bank clerk in New York, or Paris, and told him he was guilty of something he would say, "What's the rap?" I think they would then be required to tell him what it was and, if he was innocent, I don't think it would take two acts to prove it.

Maybe that's over simplification, but it will have to do until the next election.

There is no possible doubt about the eminence of M. Barrault, Mlle. Renaud and their large supporting cast or the extremely effective sets of Felix Labisse. I believe they all combined to give Herr Kafka a fair trial, but I think the judge would have dismissed the case.

"Les Fausses Confidences" & "Baptiste"

New York Post

November 13, 1952

By Richard Watts Jr.

Some Important French Visitors

The arrival of the celebrated Paris acting company of Jean-Louis Barrault and Madeleine Renaud at the Ziegfeld last night was at once a theatrical and cultural event, a social occasion, and a pleasant demonstration of international friendship. It was quite a gala gathering in every way, with the city's beauty and chivalry present to pay proper tribute to the eminent visitors, an engaging introductory speech in English by M. Barrault, the national anthems of France and America played, and, as a final touch of some kind, Elsa Maxwell bouncing about.

It was all, save conceivably that last item, agreeable, friendly and, in a day of international frictions, heart-warming, and it left no doubt that the personable foreigners are welcome guests of the nation. As their opening bill, the distinguished Barrault Renaud troupers offered Marivaux's classic eighteenth-century comedy, "Les Fausses Confidences," or, as you and I might prefer to call it, "The False Secrets," and, as the afterpiece, a completely delightful pantomime by Jacques Prevert, with music by Kosma, known as "Baptiste."

Gay Charade

If it begins to seem that I am doing a bit of beating about the available bushes before getting down to a critical contemplation of the two offerings, it is not the result of any lack of admiration for them. It is rather because I suspect that I may not be at my most illuminating in a discussion of classic French comedy. These gay little charades about romantic lovers, wily servants who are much shrewder than their masters, misunderstandings and intercepted letters are bright and graceful without being especially stimulating.

The important thing, at least for English-speaking audiences, is the style and relish that the French actors bring to their work. "Les Fausses Confidences" is charming in both setting and costumes, and the grace and general attractiveness of the playing is most agreeable to look upon, even if the comedy itself is somewhat the victim of the language barrier, since, even though the plot manipulations are not too difficult to follow, complete appreciation depends on a knowledge of French literary style, I, for one, do not possesss.

The Pantomime

It is in part because "Baptiste" is a pantomime that those who are not altogether comfortable in the French tongue are likely to find it the more rewarding part of the evening. But the reason for the delight it provides lies deeper than this. The really important cause is that this playful little tale about the lovelorn Baptiste, who, in his dream, kills an old-clothes vendor, is gay, humorous, imaginative and thoroughly enchanting in its style, its music, its colors, its inventiveness, and its curious loveliness.

As the sly servant in the Marivaux comedy and the moon-struck lover in the pantomime, M. Barrault demonstrates that he is every bit as brilliant a man of the theater as his Paris reputation has indicated. Mlle. Renaud is excellent as the heroine of the former work and the statue Baptiste loves in the latter, but it was Simone Valere, with her beauty, grace, romantic charm and winning humor, who seemed to me to score the feminine triumph of the evening in both sections of the bill. I look forward to seeing her Ophelia to the Barrault Hamlet. Also the Barrault Hamlet.

"LES FAUSSES CONFIDENCES" and "BAPTISTE"

"Les Fausses Confidences", drama by Marivaux; direction by Jean-Louis Barrault; decor and costumes by Maurice Brianchon; followed by "Baptiste", pantomime ballet by Jacques Prevert; music by Kosma; choreography by M. Barrault; decor by Mayo. Presented by S. Hurok at the Ziegfeld Theatre, November 12, 1952. The casts:

"Les Fausses Confidences"

Araminte....Madeleine Renauld
Dorante.....Jean Desailly
M. Remi.....Pierre Bertin
Madame Argante.....
Marie-Helene Daste
Arlequin...Jean-Pierre Granval
Dubois....Jean-Louis Barrault
Marton.....Simone Valere
Le Comte.....Regis Outin
L'Orfevre..Jean-Francois Calve
Le Valet.....Jacques Galland

"Baptiste"

Baptiste...Jean-Louis Barrault
La Statue....Madeleine Renaud
Le Chanteur.....Jean Desailly
La Petite Fille.....
Elina Labourdette
Arlequin.....Serge Perrault
La Gardien de Square.....
Jean Juillard
La Lavandiere...Simone Valere
Le Bijoutier.....
Jean-Pierre Granval
La Duchesse..Madeleine Renaud
Les Laquais...Jacques Galland
and Pierre Sonnier
Le Marchand D'Habits.....
Beauchamp

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

November 13, 1952

Barrault-Renaud Troupe

By WALTER F. KERR

JEAN-LOUIS BARRAULT and Madeleine Renaud have made enormous and exciting reputations for themselves—and for their adventurous young acting company—at the Theatre Marigny in Paris. There, as we have been hearing, they have worked out fresh and superbly styled methods of doing the older classics at the same time that they have explored the possibilities of the all but lost art of pantomime. American theatergoers have had a taste of Barrault's mimic work in the film, "Children of Paradise," but not until Wednesday evening was there any opportunity to study the brilliance of the ensemble in action, or even to catch hold of the flavor of that choreographed cartoon known as "Baptiste."

Sol Hurok, with some financial assistance from the French government, has transported the troupe to the Ziegfeld, where it will be holding forth for the next few weeks. The opening bill includes not only a three-act divertissement known as "Les Fausses Confidences"—in the eighteenth-century French of Marivaux—but also the complete "Baptiste" in all of its six gayly colored, enchantingly acted 'tableaux.'

Against fetching candy-box backdrops designed by Mayo, and to a tinkling accompaniment composed by Kosma, M. Barrault plays out the mocking lament of a Pierrot who has fallen madly in love with a statue, who watches the statue dance off with another man, and who is willing to dare any deed and any deception to win her back.

The choreography spins through a magical series of antic images. Barrault wistfully offering a bouquet to his lady of marble, watering the flowers with his abundant tears, trying to hang himself on an unreliable tree, stitching up some old clothes in order to make himself presentable, and biting his nails in extravagant anguish when he still fails to best his rival, is an inspired zany. And the sudden delight with which Mlle. Renaud, as the truant statue, finds herself coming inexplicably to life, the unaccustomed stiffness with which she executes her first steps of freedom, the gleeful giddiness with which she fills her skirt with imaginary jewels, are memorable pictures filled with the sheer joy of existence.

"Baptiste" is a light, swift, scampering exercise in gayety. To say that, as a pantomime, it had achieved emotional power or any sort of real weight would be saying too much. It is perhaps most reminiscent—the predominantly piano accompaniment may have something to do with this—of the silent films at their irrepressible earliest, their irrepressible best. How much more can be done with the medium is M. Barrault's secret—for the present.

Marivaux' "False Secrets" is a theatrical conceit which, for all the furious leafing of the libretto which this reviewer had to do in order to keep up with it, survives the language difficulty and emerges as a model of stylistic playing. Marivaux wrote it for a company of Italian comedians reared in the commedia dell'arte tradition, and the Harlequins and the unscrupulous valets of that fine old school pop up with ingratiating familiarity.

They pop up even in the drawing-room, and what results is an elegant, graceful high comedy born of the lowest slapstick. The stylization which this resourceful company lavishes on the piece has nothing to do with that self-conscious and superimposed extravagance which sometimes passes for the same technique among amateurs; it comes instead from an honest character impulse — easy, effortless, always illuminating. The shy modesty with which Mlle. Renaud urges a servant to continue singing her praises is deliciously real. And when Barrault juts out his lower jaw at a truculent Harlequin, smiles cynically when he thinks his lovelorn mistress isn't listening, or dives into a jack-knife bow before he winningly reveals his next palpable untruth, is the stuff of life magnified—not artily distorted. And for all its broadness, this style is capable of tenderness; as in the amusing, yet still quite touching, sighs which mistress and maid-in-waiting direct at the same man.

The company is uniformly impeccable, the sheen on the production endlessly glittering. Any one who is seriously interested in techniques of acting — whatever the state of his French—is pretty much under obligation to get himself to the Ziegfeld promptly.

The New York Times

November 13, 1952

The Barraults Open Season of French Repertory With a Comedy by Marivaux

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Madeleine Renaud, Jean-Louis Barrault and their Theatre Marigny company have arrived in New York, and they are most welcome. After suitable patriotic exercises, which were also most welcome, the Barraults raised the curtain on Marivaux' "Les Fausses Confidences" (The False Secrets) at the Ziegfeld last evening, and inaugurated a month of repertory in French.

This is bound to be a merciful element in international relations, since actors are notoriously more competent than statesmen. But it is also going to be stimulating for the New York theatre. For the Barrault troupe is a repertory company, as much interested in the style of production as in the material of a play.

* * *

"Les Fausses Confidences" derives from the early eighteenth century when French comedy was developing out of Molière into a more naturalistic tradition. It is an artificial comedy involving a series of intrigues through which an impecunious suitor contrives to marry a rich widow. As a piece of literature it does not appear to be remarkably distinguished. But Marivaux wrote it for Italian actors who were still under the influence of the commedia dell'arte tradition, and this is the factor that concerns American audiences more than the text.

For the amazing plasticity of the Barrault acting is rooted in pantomime which, in turn, was the genius of commedia dell'arte. From this point of view the performance of "Les Fausses Confidences" is a thorough delight, and unlike anything we have here except in ballet. It is beautifully set against a lovely, improvised setting by Maurice Brianchon that values design above construction, and it is dressed in the ornate formal costumes of the seventeenth century.

* * *

The lighting, particularly of the faces of the actors, might be more ingenious, surely; and, curiously enough, M. Barrault's costume is the only perfunctory one of the lot. But M. Brianchon's spontaneously executed decor is a real triumph of mind over matter. What we have seen of French décor in this country suggests that the French have more confidence in a designer's brains than they have in the carpenter shop.

The performance is all lightness and fluidity. These are actors who have been together so long under single management that they move around the stage as though they were in a ballet—the gestures swift and skimming, the tempo breezy, the spirit buoyantly humorous. Nothing is serious, heavy or dull. Everything's sunny and gay. The word "playing" has a specific meaning when a company of actors is accomplished enough to use a script as the theme of a performance.

Instead of playing the part of the wily suitor, which was no doubt intended originally as one of the two central roles, M. Barrault plays the intriguing servant who manuevers his master into a rich marriage. M. Barrault is a slender, somewhat ascetic-looking actor with a good voice and remarkably well co-ordinated movement. He leaps in and out of the play like a mischievous elf—the style broad and comic.

Dressed in the marvelously decorative costumes of the period and adorned with a white wig, Mme. Renaud looks every inch a lady of grace and breeding. Her wealthy widow is full of spirit—modestly coquettish, generous, quick-minded and independent.

* * *

The company is uniformly excellent. Simone Valère's susceptible though enchanting female companion; Jean Desailly's disingenuous suitor; Pierre Bertin's choleric barrister; Jean-Pierre Granval's harlequin servant are all delightful in a spirit of amiable make-believe.

Following "Les Fausses Confidences," M. Barrault and his company perform a pleasant pantomime, Jacques Prevert's "Baptiste," with a good-natured score by Kosma. Parts of this pantomime American cinema audiences have already seen in "Children of Paradise."

For a number of reasons, including a fresh point of view about the art of the theatre, the Barraults and their Marigny company are most welcome.

DAILY NEWS

November 13, 1952

French Players Bow at Ziegfeld

By JOHN CHAPMAN

A pleasant company of French actors headed by Jean-Louis Barrault and his wife, Madeleine Renaud, had themselves a fancy and fancy-dress opening last evening at the Ziegfeld Theatre. With S. Hurok as the importer—and Hurok is the best importer of foreign delicacies of our time—the Barrault-Renaud company drew an audience of first-nighters which was remarkably international. I never heard anybody addressed as anything less than "Monsieur le President"—but I never did catch who was president of what.

This French acting company has come over here to present within a month plays ranging from last evening's Eighteenth Century comedy of manners, "Les Fausses Confidences," to "Hamlet," by Guillaume Shakespeare. It therefore is certain that there will be a lot of conversation on both sides of the footlights at the Ziegfeld. The French invented talk.

They Know Their French.

"Les Fausses Confidences," by Marivaux, has an intricate and lengthy scenario about love. As it is acted by our visitors, it is beautiful to look at and lively to listen to. After all, nobody can talk French like the French, and Monsieur Barrault and his companions are experts. They also are most engaging players, even if they are more elaborate in whatever they do than the stodgy hirelings available through the American Actors' Equity. I think Barrault is a better actor than Mlle. Renaud is an actress—but she is much prettier, and last evening she wore a couple of period gowns designed by the late Christian Dior which made me certain that no woman of this century has ever been properly dressed.

As an afterpiece for "Les Fausses Confidances," the company is putting on a pantomime titled "Baptiste" which is really a ballet for actors who can dance a little. It is a wordless story, with fairly interesting music by Tibor Kosma, about a harlequin who falls in love with a statue. It's good movie stuff—and it already has been in a movie. Barrault is the harlequin, and fairly agile. His wife doesn't have much to do as the statue.

Next week the players will offer Andre Gide's and Barrault's adaptation of Franz Kafka's "The Trial."

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 13, 1952

French Company Is Enchanting

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The company of Madeleine Renaud and Jean-Louis Barrault indisputably won the hearts of its first New York audience last night at the Ziegfeld.

These French actors offered a view of theater which from many points of view is entirely different from anything we are used to. Their style, their humor, their integrity and their illumination all served to enchant a crowded and most enthusiastic house.

Of their many attributes, the most impressive to Americans must be their magical working camaraderie, product of long collaboration in their art. I can remember no period play served up locally with such an effect of all its parts belonging to its whole. This troupe achieves blend, the way all the units of a lightning calculator work for each other, or the way ingeniously selected ingredients make an exquisite pastry.

Famous Pantomime.

The opening bill combines "False Secrets" of Marivaux, with the pantomime "Baptiste," which made Barrault so famous here when he did excerpts from it in a moving picture.

The former work is a romantic comedy of intrigue, 18th Century, and rampant with the snares of ambition and social codes. The story is a web, unlikely to be untangled by any but the most attentive French-speaking onlooker. In the art of this company, the specific words, and the details of complications make not the slightest difference. The players are so explicit, and so uncompromisingly honest, that any child can appreciate each situation, and participate in the emotional involvements.

Renaud is a breath-taking central figure here, as a widow pursued by several suitors. Her quiet subtle elegance imbues the piece with rare quality, as she manipulates the other characters and aims to get her own way. Sudden

little gestures are like piercing rays of light on a moment of a feeling. Watch her trail one finger down her cheek in hesitation, then quickly flutter it in recognition of the answer she has been seeking.

Radiant Beauty.

Her personal beauty has a soft radiance and physical grace.

Barrault is here a mischievous valet, warm, troublous and witty, but it is in the pantomime that his genius is more noticably exhibited.

"Baptiste" is a play to music, with snatches of song but without words. It is dance in the sense that all its movement is lyrical, but none of the motion is formal in the steps or figures one associates either with classic ballet or the freer invention of modern dance.

At heart it is a variation on the traditional story of the clown who falls in love with a statue, kills for her and loses her. This is the art that made silent pictures possible, with all the passion and wildness of elemental emotions made utterly wittily clear through gesture and pose. Barrault's pathos and impudence remind you of Chaplin, but there is more violence and irreverence, and more explosive exuberance.

His sewing on a button is the essence of this communication, as he makes you feel the shape and slide, the knot and tug of the thread that is not there.

Daily Mirror

November 13, 1952

French Acting Company Gives Play at Ziegfeld

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Some seven years ago Madeleine Renaud and Jean-Louis Barrault left the Comedie Francaise to found their own company at the Theatre Marigny in Paris. Many of their associates at the citadel of French drama joined them in their new venture. They based their repertory on the works of Shakespeare and Marivaux. These dramatists became the talismen of the ambitious young organization.

So, when S. Hurok, with the cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the French Government, presented the Renaud-Barrault company here at the Ziegfeld Theatre last evening, Marivaux's "Les Fausses Confidences" ("The False Secrets") was chosen as the opening dramatic attraction. It shared the program with a pantomime, "Baptiste."

Though some critics give Marivaux classic stature today, he was taken lightly in his own age. Voltaire said: "He is forever weighing a fly's eggs in cobweb scales!" He was not unknown in England.

"The False Secrets" is a contrived, mannered comedy, long on talk and short on action. The story has to do with handsome young Dorante, who obtains a post in the household of the rich and attractive young Araminte, the better to win her hand. After much intrigue, he is successful. It owes something to the Commedia dell'arte, for two of the leading intriguers are characters right out of that spontaneous theatrical form.

It is difficult for us to pass judgment on the play and players. Having lost facility in translation, we were unable to catch many of the subtleties of the script and therefore to estimate accurately the shadings of the performers. The acting is highly stylized. There is incessant motion and much use of the arms and hands.

In addition to Renaud and Barrault, the cast also offers Jean Desailly, Pierre Bertin, Marie-Helene Daste, Jean-Pierre Granval, Simone Valere and Regis Outin.

The decor by Maurice Brianchon is quite simple. It uses a few set pieces and white screens against a colorful backdrop. It is remarkably effective. The costumes are gorgeous.

"Baptiste," which has a libretto by Jacques Prevert, choreography by Barrault and music by Kosma is more pantomime than ballet. It is engaging pantomime, and brings a refreshing note to the new theatrical season. The six tableaux have been smartly, handsomely set by Mayo.

The initial audience, which numbered many distinguished members of our local French colony, gave the gracious visitors an enthusiastic welcome. We think you should pay them a visit, if you care to see how the French theatre compares with ours. And you might take your Petit Larousse along with you.

Journal-American

November 13, 1952

Speakers of French Will Have Fine Time

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE celebrated French stars, Madeleine Renaud and Jean-Louis Barrault, and their supporting players, last night opened at the Ziegfeld Theatre in the first of a drama series which will occupy the premises for the next month or so.

The repertory is delivered entirely in French, and last evening's premiere produced a glittering conclave of the fashionable international set, plus a few monolingual locals who sat stolidly through the proceedings for the sake of being seen.

It was a gala occasion, getting under way with the two national anthems and a gracious speech by M. Barrault; and the opulence and enthusiasm of the customers indicated that S. Hurok, who brought the company here in cooperation with the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, will have little difficulty peddling pasteboards for the duration of the run.

Just Innocuous

The current offering is a sort of double bill: the first half devoted to an 18th century comedy of manners and strategems called "The False Secrets," by Marivaux; the second half to a delightful pantomime, "Baptiste," by Jacques Prevert and M. Barrault.

"Les Fausses Confidences" (False Secrets, to you) is one of those lively and innocuous little bouts in which a gentleman wants to marry a rich widow and would probably have done so at once if the playwright hadn't injected a disapproving mother, a wealthy Count, a maid and a particularly designing valet.

This results in prolonged deception, confusion and intrigue, but to the dismay of exactly nobody it all comes out ducky in the end. "Toujour l' amour," I often say.

Strictly as comedy, in terms of modern entertainment, "Secrets" lacks depth and movement. But as a charming museum piece, beautifully mounted and performed with distinction, it must be recommended highly to anyone with a reasonable knowledge of French.

It has another asset: dismissing the difference in tongue it is a classic example of the demonstrative school of acting, the continental ability to make a motionless scene come to life with pace and gestures.

In this department Mlle. Renaud shared top honors with M. Barrault, capably assisted by Jean Desailly, Pierre Bertin, Marie-Helene Daste and Simon Valere.

"Baptiste," the second half of the evening, served both as a relief to those who had been struggling with their French and an engaging exhibition of the talents of almost the same cast devoted to pantomime.

Here, in a series of six tableaux, we see the simple story of a Harlequin who falls in love with the statue of a dancing girl, pursuing her in a mad dream hegira through stream and vale, ending in a reception at the home of a Duchess, where retribution overtakes him.

M. Barrault, as the central figure, proved to be graceful and entirely effortless in the ballet numbers and equally gifted as a comic mime. He even drew a hand, at one point, for the old bit of sewing an imaginary button on a coat with an imaginary thread.

Once more he was indebted to his wife, Mlle. Renaud, as the dancer-Duchess, and to Joseph Kosma, who wrote the music, and particularly to somebody billed merely as "Mayo," who ran up a series of flats and back-drops as tasteful and imaginative as anything seen in these parts this season.

I don't know the extent of the local French-speaking public, but I hope they can all be accommodated. They'll have a good time.

"Iolanthe"

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 11, 1952

'Iolanthe' Is Best Of G&S Offerings

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The Gilbert and Sullivan troupe at the Hellinger has saved its best for the last. The current offering, "Iolanthe," might very well manage a substantial run entirely on its own.

For a great many old fans of the famous creative pair, "Iolanthe" is favorite above all, despite the vaster popularity of other operas like "Mikado" and "Pinafore." "Iolanthe" is surely as steady and sustained, musically, as any of the others, and from the point of view of story, lyrics, and jokes in general, it is easily superior.

Although it seems a little late to be calling the work original, I can think of no other musical or straight play with such a refreshing premise as this one of a young man of 25 whose mother is only 17.

This same hero has a difficult time of it, since his mother has a magical nature, which his father did not share, and when he chooses to disappear in a hurry he is sometimes left half way through a keyhole with his legs dangling behind.

Solid Entertainment.

Last night it was during the second or third chorus of "Faint Heart Never Won Fair Lady," when Martyn Green was offering one of his incomparable dances, that the show suddenly took hold of the audience, no longer as a nostalgic delight, but as a genuinely solid entertainment in its current right.

Neither Green, nor Ella Halman, as the Queen of the Fairies, has been better in this series, or ever for that matter. And the rest of the company is at its alertest and most genuinely charming. Lillian Murphey sings so well so easily that you forget how young she is, and how new to Broadway or any other show business.

Frank Rogier is a fine Strephon with his impeccable pronunciation and a grand virile voice, and Robert Eckles makes a most telling Pvt. Willis, with his witty discourse on Liberals and Conservatives. Glynn Hill is handsome and mellow-throated as the Iolanthe, whose banishment to the bottom of a stream causes such confusion.

In Elegant Form.

Joseph Macauley has remained one of my favorite performers since he sang "Ma Belle" so resoundingly in "The Three Musketeers." Last night he was in elegant form, and made up for an entrance delayed by a missing vest, by singing "In Good King George's Days" in wonderfully rousing style.

For certain onlookers sharply versed in the modern vernacular, some phrases in the opera assume an added comical implication beyond their original intention, but this disturbs no one.

The production is fine, half of it a pastel jungle, and the other a smart House of Parliament, and Lehman Engel has his orchestra on its smartest musical toes. I would say that with "Iolanthe" there is no question but that the new G. and S. company is in.

"IOLANTHE"

Operetta by Gilbert and Sullivan; costumes by Peggy Morrison; musical director Lehman Engel; settings by Ralph Alswang; staged and presented by S. M. Chartock at the Mark Hellinger Theatre, November 10, 1952. The cast:

Leila.....Mary Roche
Celia.....Audrey Dearden
Fleta.....Eileen Moran
The Fairy Queen...Ella Halman
Iolanthe.....Glynn Hill
Strephon.....Frank Rogier
Phyllis.....Lillian Murphy
Lord Chancellor..Martyn Green
Earl of Tolloler...Earl William
Earl of Mount Ararat.....
Joseph Macaulay
Private Willis...Robert Eckles

Journal-American

November 11, 1952

Experience Is All That's Lacking

By JOHN McCLAIN

AS THEIR final offering in the Gilbert and Sullivan repertory the S. M. Chartock company last night presented "Iolanthe" at the Mark Hellinger Theatre. This was proof, once again, that these rather hastily-assembled and predominantly American operators will emerge after suitable seasoning as logical successors to the D'Oyly Carte troupe that monopolized the Savoyard business for so many decades.

Their entire series has been a resounding success and their minor omissions have been the result of exigency rather than lack of talent or enthusiasm.

It will take a prolonged tour and many performances before the less experienced members of the cast arrive at that happy state in which the music and lyrics are automatic and they can devote themselves wholeheartedly to the action.

Lot of Progress

Quite a lot of progress has been made since the company first opened with "Mikado" a few weeks ago. There was then a general air of lethargy, which has since been dispelled by more strenuous action on the part of the chorus and an immense improvement in either the energies of the pit orchestra or the acoustics of the theatre, or both.

Somebody said the fault was in the depth of the orchestra pit, and if that is the case it seemed to have been remedied last night.

"Iolanthe" happens to be my least favorite of the usual Gilbert-Sullivan offerings. It is less melodic than the others and suffers greatly from an aggravated case of whimsies. But, as in all the previous efforts, one can rely upon Martyn Green to snatch the fat out of the fire.

High Comedy

Entirely with his own talents and tricks, the result of years of trial and error, he manages to bring to the role of Lord Chancellor enough bits of high comedy to transcend the pedestrain material. It's worth a trip to the Hellinger to hear him execute the nightmare number, speeding up the tempo with each encore.

Other staunch members of this cast are Frank Rogier, as Strephon; Earl William and Joseph Macaulay, as the two contentious Earls; Glynn Hill as Iolanthe; Ella Halman as the Fairy Queen; Lillian Murphy as Phyllis and Mary Roche as Leila.

After this week Mr. Chartock's company takes to the road—bearing with it the good wishes of all who delight in keeping the great G. & S. tradition alive.

The New York Times

November 11, 1952

'Iolanthe' Put On by S. M. Chartock's Gilbert and Sullivan Company at the Mark Hellinger

By BROOKS ATKINSON

In the fourth week of its Gotham incarnation Mr. Chartock's Gilbert and Sullivan troupe is in excellent form. It is bringing us an enchanting performance of "Iolanthe," which opened at the Mark Hellinger last evening. After having the same musicians under his baton for three weeks, Lehman Engel, the Mississippi maestro, has developed a responsive orchestra that fills a large theatre with the mellow tone and the decorous harmonies of Sullivan's most captivating score.

Since "Iolanthe" is the loveliest of the Savoy operas, Mr. Chartock's taste in singers is a rich asset. Lillian Murphy's Phyllis is straight out of the glades of Arcady. Glynn Hill's Iolanthe is a touching stroke of rueful caprice.

* * *

As the three lieutenant fairies, Mary Roche, Audrey Dearden and Eileen Moran are just about ideal. And Ella Halman's Fairy Queen is her best part—majestic, imposing, resonant and humorous withal. Gilbert would have relished the lyrical daintiness of the women who slip down the aisles of his sardonic fairyland in this production.

No one will be surprised to hear that Martyn Green's most susceptible chancellor is light in touch and dry in humor, though cynics may be surprised to hear that he does not overclown excessively. He overclowns moderately, which in itself shows improvement. As Strephon, Iolanthe's half-immortal son, Frank Rogier gives a brilliant performance. He sings like a thorobred and he acts an artificial role admirably.

* * *

As the Earl of Mount Ararat, Joseph Macaulay gives a perfect Gilbertian performance. He acts a mock heroic style like a man who has mastered his material, and he sings with the authority of a professional. Robert Eckles, with his little peek of mischief through a fierce make-up, makes a wonderful Private Willis.

If a few critical petulancies are acceptable at this point in this column, let's point out that the romantic elements in the production surpass the humorous. The fairy chorus has caught the mood of lyricism more happily than the male chorus has caught the mood of travesty. Much of the fairy dialogue is spoken in a conversational tone without artifice, and that is a blemish. Miss Halman with her measured delivery is a model of style in dialogue; she has acquired it through experience. In general, however, the fairy sequences have just the right tone half way between grace and satire.

* * *

But the chorus of peers, imposingly caparisoned in robes and crowns, is inclined to walk through its scenes as though Gilbert were an operetta hack. He was not. He was a very testy Victorian, who took style for granted, but made a career of ridiculing it. Apart from Mr. Green, who is a genius in Savoy opera, Mr. Macaulay and Mr. Eckles are the performers who never forget that these are crisp comic operas, dry and immaculate, full of sound and impishness signifying nonsense.

The program does not identify the leader of the chorus of peers. But he, too, is the perfect Gilbertian. He is solemn, vain, rigid, precise in his movements, condescending in manner. He doesn't waste movement. His gestures portray a character. He is insincerely heroic, which just about sums up the Gilbertian attitude.

These classroom comments notwithstanding, this is a beautiful production of "Iolanthe." Mr. Chartock, as well as paying Savoyards, ought to feel encouraged.

New York Herald Tribune

November 11, 1952

'Iolanthe'

By WALTER F. KERR

THE promising new Gilbert and Sullivan troupe which has the sly, serene, and everlasting skipping Martyn Green as its headliner opened its fourth and final bill of the New York season Monday night. In the course of tuning up for a long road tour, the fresh and engaging American organization has made steady gains in authority, in vigor, and in antic buoyance during its stopover at the Hellinger. If "Iolanthe," which winds up the local season, hasn't the carefree zest of last week's "Pinafore," it is nevertheless a brighter and more confident offering than the drowsy "Mikado" with which S. M. Chartock's company made its bow.

"Iolanthe" is, of course, a fairly rarefied business under the best of circumstances. Though it has its passionate admirers, its mockery is a good bit subtler, and a lot more straight-faced, than the average run of the operas. The basic fun lies in the profound gravity with which some businesslike fairies do in the whole British Parliament, and its tongue-in-cheek heroics require extraordinary suavity together with the slyest, and the faintest, of winks.

It is just these special qualities which a green and growing ensemble are likeliest to be without, and the boys and girls at the Hellinger do stumble over them. The opening chorus ("we are dainty little fairies") has a deadpan earnestness about it which is almost funny—but not unmistakably so. It isn't quite clear yet whether these agreeable young ladies are being deliberately solemn in order to underscore the joke, or whether they are simply still very much concerned about remembering their lines.

This lack of comic definition pops up elsewhere. Frank Rogier, as that unfortunate Strephon who is immortal down to the waist and aging rapidly thereunder, comes down pretty heavily on the pastoral lunacies which Gilbert so deftly kidded, and Lillian Murphy, though possessed of a most attractive voice, has not yet got past doing a stock company job on the satire.

Even Martyn Green, undoubtedly tired from the chore of helping pull together so many operas in so few weeks, shows a flagging ebullience here and there. His "When You're Lying Awake" is perfectly articulated and managed with a nice economy of gesture. But for all the adroit ease with which he handles the tongue-twisters, he is currently making the number seem more of a challenge than a lark to be carried off gaily. He is fun, though, when he is stamping his foot petulantly over the thought that, as Lord Chancellor in charge of marriageable wards, he must spend his day giving girls away instead of keeping them for himself, and, when his feet finally begin to run away with him in "Faint Heart Ne'er Won Fair Maid," he is his customarily zany and irrepressible self.

It is the more experienced members of the supporting company, Ella Halman and Joseph Macauley, who give this "Iolanthe" its real lift. Miss Halman finds the role of the Fairy Queen her most rewarding of the season, and she is superbly grim and coy in turn during "O Fairy Fay." Mr. Macauley thunders out "When Britain Really Ruled the Waves" with majestic condescension, and he gives the dialogue its most delightful reading as he soberly contends with a fellow Peer for a girl who is engaged to them both.

Gilbert's fairy queen may have learned how to swing on a cobweb, but it is the special handicap of the new company as a whole that it isn't yet nimble enough for such delicate nonsense. With a long road tour on which to cut their teeth, they should come back ready for anything—perhaps even "Patience." The talent is all there.

Daily News

November 11, 1952

G & S Company In 'Iolanthe'

By ROBERT SYLVESTER

S. M. Chartock's Gilbert and Sullivan Co. launched the last week of its local stand with "Iolanthe" at the Mark Hellinger last night. A goodly crowd was on hand for one of the gayest, giddiest and probably foolishist of the G. & S. epics.

Dealing with assorted fairies who live at the bottom of the brook, a shepherd boy in powdered wig and satins, and a harassed nobility, "Iolanthe" fluttered along its tuneful way with first class performances by Martyn Green, as the befuddled Lord Chancellor, and Lillian Murphy as the bewitching Phyllis.

Glynn Hill is the fairy mother who manages to be only 17 and still the mater of a lad of "five and twenty" and Ella Halman is an opinionated fairy queen who takes no nonsense from the judiciary.

Mr. Green and his musical cohorts take to the long, long road after this week's production but will doubtless be back with us next Fall. The Gilbert and Sullivan production again drew consistently good business here.